**The Importance of a VAP**

Signing a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity (VAP) is an important step in the preservation of the rights of child, father, and mother alike. The following explains what you need to know about what a VAP is, how to sign one, and why VAPs are so important.

**What Is a VAP?**

Signing a [Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity](https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/voluntary-acknowledgment-parentage-vap) form is a way for a father to establish legal parentage--and the rights that are associated with being a parent--without going to court. While parentage is *assumed* when parents are married, if parents are *not* married, both parties must sign the VAP in order for the father to establish legal paternity.

**When and Where Can a VAP Be Signed?**

A VAP can be signed at any time before or after a child’s birth, and is often signed right in the hospital when the child is born. It must be signed by both parents, and be signed in front of a witness of at least 18 years of age in order to be valid.

If you do not sign the VAP at the hospital, no problem - you still have time to sign it. If this is the case, both parents should sign it, and then the VAP should be mailed to Illinois’ Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

Keep in mind that in the event that the mother is married to another person who is *not* the biological parent of the child, this party will first have to sign a Voluntary Denial of Parentage form before the biological father can sign the Voluntary Acknowledgement of Parentage form.

**The Importance of Signing a VAP**

As stated above, [signing a VAP](http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/birth-death-other-records/birth-records/paternity) protects the rights of all parties involved. It is important for the mother, father, and of course, the child. Here’s how:

* **For the father…** A father who signs a VAP is establishing his parental rights. *Without* parental rights, a father would not be able to petition for visitation or custody with his child, make decisions about the child’s upbringing, or have any say in other important decisions, such as healthcare or education.
* **For the child…** For a child, knowing the identity of his or her father is important not just from an emotional perspective, but from a very logical one, too. When a child has a legal father, this preserves their rights to certain benefits (Social Security on their father’s record, child support, etc.), and can provide them with important genetic and medical information as it pertains to healthcare.
* **For the mother…** For a mother, it can be very important to establish paternity for preserving the child’s rights to certain benefits (mentioned above), and receiving child support.

**Learn More About Establishing Paternity in Illinois**

If you have questions about establishing paternity in Illinois or the rights that are associated with paternity, do not hesitate to contact our [experienced Illinois paternity lawyers](http://faylawfirm.com/contact-us/) at the law offices of Fay, Farrow & Associates, P.C. We serve the areas of Downers Grove, Naperville, Wheaton, Lisle, Lombard, and Aurora. Contact us today to schedule your initial consultation and learn more.